

NEWS RELEASE

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BELLEVILLE WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO HURRICANE KATRINA FRAUD, AGGRAVATED IDENTITY THEFT AND PUBLIC BENEFIT FRAUDS

Randy G. Massey, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois announced today that **TINA MARIE WINSTON**, a.k.a Tina Marie Gilmore, 34, of Belleville, Ill. entered a plea of guilty to four counts of mail fraud, three counts of making false statements, two counts of concealment of material information from the Social Security Administration and single counts of misuse of a Social Security Number and aggravated identity theft on October 6. The convictions related to **WINSTON's** commission of Hurricane Katrina fraud and other public benefit frauds.

At the time of her plea, Winston admitted that in September, 2005, she filed an internet application for Hurricane Katrina disaster assistance, using a false social security number. Winston falsely represented to FEMA that her home in New Orleans was damaged, that she suffered loss of personal property, that she had lost two children in the disaster, and that she needed money to pay for the memorial service which she had under a bridge in St. Louis.

FEMA sent Winston \$4,358 as a result of the scheme, though Winston had asked FEMA for additional compensation for losses which she did not sustain, including personal property loss in the amount of \$10,075 and dental expenses in the amount of \$2,530.

In October, 2005, Winston applied for Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), a program funded by FEMA. In her application, Winston falsely stated that Hurricane Katrina had caused her to lose her job, and she falsely stated that she had no other financial resources and that she was not receiving Social Security benefits. Winston's application was approved and she was sent an electronic debit card, which she used to obtain \$1,321.54 worth of purchases. FEMA cut the card off when Winston exceeded the spending limit.

Winston also admitted to defrauding the Social Security Administration during the time period of May 27, 1994, until June, 2006 by failing to report her marriage and income, resulting in an overpayment of \$13,366.11; to lying on an application for food stamps and Medicaid filed in July, 2004, by failing to disclose her marriage, resulting in an overpayment of \$4,659; and to making

false statements in an attempt to obtain Section 8 housing valued at \$6,758 by falsely identifying her husband as her cousin and lying about their income.

Sentencing is scheduled for January 12, 2007. Winston has been held without bond since her arrest on June 22, 2006.

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud, and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force – chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division – includes the FBI, the U.S. Inspectors General community, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Executive Office for United States Attorneys and others. Information for the Winston indictment was obtained in an investigation conducted by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service; the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General; the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General; the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Inspector General; the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General; the State of Illinois Healthcare and Family Services, Office of Inspector General – Bureau of Investigations; the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General; and the Illinois State Police Medicaid Fraud Bureau.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Suzanne M. Garrison.

If anyone has information concerning possible fraud being committed during the post-Katrina recovery effort, please call either the Department of Homeland Security-Office of the Inspector General Fraud Hotline at 1-866-720-5721 or the FBI Fraud Hotline at 1-800-225-5324.